Suharto's visit to Dresden

TL5631

Even before the Indonesian President, Suharto, arrived in Dresden on 5 April, the visit was bogged down in difficulty. The President had been invited by Kurt Biedenkopf, Minister-President of Sachsen. He was to have been asked to sign the city's Distinguished Visitor's Book but the City Parliament had not been asked for their approval. On hearing about the plan, the mayor of Dresden, Herbert Wagner, said he would not consent the plan for Suharto to sign the Book. Four political parties in the City Parliament, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Bürgerfraktion, SPD and PDS, which together comprise the majority, issued a joint statement declaring that Suharto was not welcome in the city because of human rights abuses in Indonesia.

The Indonesian President was to have attended a performance at the Semper Opera but the orchestra flatly refused to perform for the Dictator. As discussion of the visit continued, Minister-President Biedenkopf said that he was willing to welcome Suharto but expressed great sympathy for people who demonstrated against the Indonesian regime's human rights violations.

Big support for the demonstrations

No fewer than twenty-seven human rights groups, church groups, civil rights groups and political parties in Dresden called on the people to demonstrate against Suharto, among them Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and Neues Forum. **It was a demonstration organized by the people of Dresden.** It is quite ludicrous to accuse Indonesians of being responsible for these activities.

Steffen Heitmann, Sachsens Minister of Justice was at Dresden airport to welcomed Suharto on his arrival. From there, the delegation went to the city's most famous building, the *Zwinger*. There were about one hundred demonstrators waiting in the inner court. As the President approached, they made a great deal of noise, banging saucepans and drums, blowing whistles, blowing trumpets and shouting through megaphones: "Suharto, murderer, murderer, murderer, murderer! Free East Timor! Go home, Suharto!"

Then hundreds of leaflets floated down from above the entrance gate, with information about human rights abuses in Indonesia and East Timor. A number of banners were unfolded with slogans as: "Kapan pulang dari Timor Timur" (When will you quit East Timor? *in Indonesian*), "Indonesien raus aus Osttimor!" (Hands of East Timor! *in German*), "Stop genocide in East Timor", "Suharto Dalang Segala Bencana",(Suharto is the cause for all disasters! *in Indonesian*) "With murderers we should not cooperate", "Go out of East Timor" , "Suharto: in Indonesia a suppresser - in Germany a welcome guest!", "39 NVA-Kriegsschiffe = deutsche Entwicklungshilfe für Indonesien" (39 warships = German developing aid for Indonesia! *in German*), and many more.

About seventy tourists in the vicinity joined in the activities and Suharto and his entourage had to make their way to the picture gallery past a very large crowd of people. Security forces were on hand to prevent the demonstrators from coming closer than 3 meters, which is routine practice for the German police in dealing with demonstrations. Outside the gallery, the demonstrants created a terrible din which made things difficult for the Indonesian president, so the visit to the gallery was cut to twenty minutes. When he entered the *Zwinger*, Suharto had a broad smile on his face but he left looking very grim.

From there he went to *Hotel Kempinski* . Although it is only seventy meters away, he went by car. There were more demonstrators in front of the hotel; they continued with their action for about two hours in the presence of a number of journalists and four TV-channels. Although the itinerary included a trip to the world-famous porcelain manufacturer in Meissen, Suharto preferred to remain in the hotel for the whole afternoon.

For me, the atmosphere was reminiscent of the reunification of East and West Germany in 1989, when the people in former East Germany went out onto the streets, demanding reunification and civil rights. The inhabitants of former East Germany know from experience the power that people can exert if they join forces to pursue a common goal. They know what it means to live in a democracy and what it means to live under a dictatorship.

At 6pm, a crowd of about four hundred people gathered outside the Opera. *Amnesty International* had asked people to go there to listen to talks about the human rights situation in Indonesia. Students from East Timor also spoke about the resistance and the human rights situation in their country. The Timorese were in Germany at the invitation of *Watch Indonesia!* which arranged for them to make a tour round the country.

With evening approaching, Suharto was still holed up in *Hotel Kempinski* so some of the demonstrators decided to make their way to the hotel but were prevented from approaching the building by the police. The demonstrators then went in the direction of the *Hilton Hotel* where the Minister-President was waiting to receive the Indonesian President and his entourage for an official dinner.

The Indonesian delegation was driven to the dinner by bus but on the way, the convoy was halted by demonstrators. Suharto, Habibie and Alatas where all sitting in the front seats. Confronted by a chain of people, holding hands, the bus had to turn round and make a retreat. A banner with the words "Kapan pulang dari Timor Timur" was plastered onto the windscreen and remained there for several minutes before being removed. The action had clearly made the Indonesians extremely upset. We could see Mrs. Alatas make a guesture with her hands to her head and then pointing to the demonstrators.

Alatas was particularly arrogant. Several times he showed his fist and gesticulated with his middle finger pointing upwards.

After the bus reversed and made its way to the *Hilton Hotel* along a different route, the demonstrators made their own way to the *Hilton* and stood aside, making a hell of a noise for about one hour.

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